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ABSTRACT

Environmentalism has become a part of the culture, and environmentalists now constitute a major social movement. The solutions to many current environmental problems require a local or national response, but solutions to other problems will require a global response. Major United Nations reports have recognized that solving global environmental problems will occur only through long-term strategies for achieving sustainable development. Education is one such long-term strategy, and adult educators possess much knowledge about adult learning and program planning and development that can be beneficial to environmentalists. However, the role adult educators should play in the environmental movement is not yet clear. Because adult educators are more accustomed to meeting the needs of individuals rather than groups, they may have to adjust some of their strategies to work with existing environmmental groups. Adult educators will need to approach environmental groups as partners who want to support rather than supplant their educational activities. They also will need to be aware of some issues affiliated with environmental education. Among those issues are that: (1) environmental education is by its very nature a political activity; (2) questioning the merits of global development raises the issue of balancing environmental needs against the needs of developing nations; and (3) because adult environmental learning is primarily a cognitive activity, perhaps adult educators should engage not in adult education but in promotion of adults who take action. (16 annotated resources) (CML)

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

TRENDS AND ISSUES ALERTS

ENVIRONMENTAL ADULT EDUCATION

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The 20th anniversary commemoration of Earth Day in April 1990 was a reminder of how far the modern environmental movement has come as well as how far it has to go. Environmentalism has become a part of the American culture and environmentalists now constitute a major social movement. Membership in such groups as the Sierra Club and the Nature Conservatory numbers 12 million, a threefold increase in the last 15 years (Carpenter 1990; Field 1989). Despite these changes, however, "the ecological woes of the 1970s appear almost provincial when compared with those of 1990" (Carpenter 1990, p. 60).

Currently, the solutions to many environmental problems require a local or national response, but solutions to some of the biggest problems will require a global response. Major UN reports, such as the World Commission on Environment and Development's (1987) ***Our Common Future***, have recognized that solving global environmental problems will not occur through a single action, but through long-term strategies for achieving sustainable development.

Although education is one such long-term strategy, it is not clear what role adult education should play in the environmental movement. Field (1989) points out that "[environmentalists] have shown that they are more than capable of meeting their own educational and developmental needs" (p. 26) and that they have already accomplished a great deal without much noticeable effort on the part of adult educators.

Some adult educators (e.g., Boggs 1986, Field 1989, and Finger 1989) have suggested that there is, indeed, a role for adult educators within the environmental movement but that it is "unlikely to be a simple matter of sticking a few courses in the programme" (Field, p. 26). Adult educators are more accustomed to meeting the needs of individuals rather than groups, so working with existing environmental groups may require some readjustment in their strategies.

To be effective, adult educators need to approach environmental groups as partners who wish to support rather than supplant their educational activities. Adult educators possess a wealth of knowledge about adult learning and program planning and development that can be beneficial to environmentalists in carrying out their educational activities.

Adult educators also need to be aware of some of the issues affiliated with environmental education. For example, it is by its very nature a political activity. Boggs (1986) suggests that many adult educators have adopted an essentially apolitical and noncontroversial posture and may be uncomfortable working with environmentalists. Also, because active environmentalists tend to be well educated already, adult educators must take care to ensure that working with them does not reinforce the already existing class bias within their programs (Field 1989).

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Another issue concerns what to teach. For example, it is not unusual for programs to question the merits of global development, therefore raising the issue of balancing environmental needs against the needs of developing nations (Sutton 1989).

Finally, Finger (1989) raises the issue of whether adult educators should engage in environmental adult learning or environmental adult transformation. He advocates the latter because it "promotes an adult person who is not only concerned about the environment but who ultimately acts, as a part of a collective movement, to protect it" (p. 31). Environmental adult learning, on the other hand, is primarily cognitive in nature in that it provides knowledge about specific environmental issues but it does not necessarily lead to environmental awareness, concern, or commitment.

This ***Trends and Issues Alert*** lists resources that can be used in exploring the opportunities and challenges of environmental adult education.

Print Resources

Andrews, E., and Jordahl, H. C., Jr. "University of Wisconsin Extension, Cooperative Extension Service: Natural and Environmental Resource Education Programs." ***Environmental Professional*** 9, no. 3 (1987): 189-194. (ERIC No. EJ 362 767).

Describes the environmental education programs of the extension service attached to the University of Wisconsin. Explains the types of programs that are geared to its various audiences.

Boggs, D. "A Case Study of Citizen Education and Action." ***Adult Education Quarterly*** 37, no. 1 (Fall 1986): 1-13. (ERIC No. EJ 339 653).

Describes members of a citizen group concerned about environmental issues as aggressive and dynamic adult learners addressing complex issues. Assistance that adult education agencies might provide similar groups and criteria for doing so are explored.

Carpenter, B. "Living with Our Legacy." ***U.S. News and World Report*** 108, no. 16 (April 23, 1990): 60-65.

Describes developments since Earth Day as well as emerging national and global environmental problems. Includes some lessons from the past that can be used to guide future efforts.

Convergence 22, no. 4 (1989). Available from 720 Bathurst Street, Suite 500, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2R4 ($7.50).

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This special issue on environmental education takes an international, adult education perspective.

Field, J. "Is the Future for Adult Education Green? Opportunities in Environmentalism." *Adults Learning* 1, no. 1 (September 1989): 24-26. (ERIC No. EJ 397 420).

Discusses why the nature of adult education may suit it for a partnership role with environmentalists. Suggests that adult educators' best opportunity may be in fostering awareness of ways in which environmentalists learn as adults.

Finger, M. "Environmental Adult Education from the Perspective of the Adult Learner." *Convergence* 22, no. 4 (1989): 25-32. (ERIC No. EJ 399 978).

Argues for the process of adult transformation as the focus of environmental adult education. Examination of the life histories of adults reveals what, where, and how they learn about the environment, what they do with this information, and how this learning contributes to adult transformation.

Forbes, J. "Environmental Education--Implications for Public Policy." *Environmentalist* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 131-42. (ERIC No. EJ 359 979).

Examines the practical requirements of educational "participation," attempting to define the kind of educational system that would meet these requirements. Describes the role of environmental education for all age groups.

Funk, J.; James, J.; Palm, J.; and Phillips, H. *Exploring Environmental Change: An Environmental Education Kit*. Willowdale, Ontario: Glen Barnard Camp, 1987. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 313 190).

This educational resource kit illustrates how a camp setting changes over time from the 1940s through 1986. The Teacher/Leader guide identifies major themes and items to look for in each illustration. Major concepts and suggestions for learning activities are included.

Knapp, C. E. *Creating Humane Climates Outdoors: A People Skills Primer*. Las Cruces, NM: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1988. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 294 706).

Designed to provide practical assistance in implementing outdoor learning experiences for youth and adults, this book helps professionals plan their leadership development programs and create more humane climates in a variety of outdoor settings. Three topics are treated: self-knowledge, human communities, and outdoor-environmental awareness and values.

Oduran, A. B. "Education against Environmental Pollution in Nigeria." *Convergence* 22, no. 4, (1989): 55-62. (ERIC No. EJ 399 980).

Describes a community education campaign designed to heighten public awareness of the pollution of air, water, and land resources in Nigeria.

Rugumayo, E. B., and Ibikunle-Johnson, V. O., comps. *Environmental Education through Adult Education. A Manual for Adult Educators, Instructors, Teachers and Social Extension Workers*. Nairobi, Kenya: African Association for Literacy and Adult Education, 1987. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 315 642).

This manual makes available to adult educators resource material that may be used in formal and nonformal training programs for the environmental education of a wide range of target groups. Themes of environmental health; agroforestry and rural development; population, environment, and development; and urban/industrial development are covered.

Sari, M., and Durko, M. *World Perspective Case Descriptions on Educational Programs for Adults: Hungary*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 311 171).

One of two case studies in this document describes a program developed in the small town of Puspokladany by a club of amateur anglers, a society for propagating scientific knowledge, and a cultural center of the town. The people involved in the program have worked to protect the wildlife around the town, to emphasize the necessity of joint action in preserving the environment, and to urge voluntary action.

Smithsonian 21, no. 1 (April 1990). Available from P.O. Box 55593, Boulder, CO 80322-5593 ($2.50).

The 20th anniversary of Earth Day and the magazine prompts this special issue on past progress and the future of the environmental movement.

Sugerman, D. A. *Adventure after 60: Working with Elders in the Outdoors*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 308 995).

The Elderhostel course, Wilderness Adventure, is described; one of its goals is to increase participants' environmental awareness and respect and knowledge about Maine's natural environment and history.

Sutton, P. "Environmental Education: What Can We Teach." *Convergence* 22, no. 4 (1989): 5-11. (ERIC No. EJ 399 976).

Suggests that the role for adult education in environmental education may be to enable others to call for action and to make decisions.

World Commission on Environment and Development. *Our Common Future*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Report of the United Nation's World Commission on Environment and Development that was asked to formulate a global agenda for change, including long-term environmental strategies for achieving sustainable development by the year 2000 and beyond.

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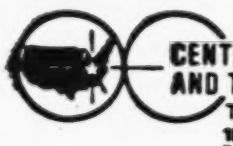

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